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360zine

Issue 27 | Jan 2009

Free Magazine For Xbox 360 Gamers. *Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates...*

EAT LEAD

Exclusive preview & interview 



PLUS!

PREVIEWED
GTA IV THE LOST AND DAMNED 

PREVIEWED
GODFATHER II 

PREVIEWED
MAFIA 2 

FREE INSIDE!
HALO WARS
OFFICIAL 17 PAGE MAGAZINE



THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

Hands-on preview inside... 

REVIEWED
DYNASTY WARRIORS: GUNDAM 2 











Welcome to 360Zine



There's something for everyone in this month's 360Zine. The most anticipated DLC we've ever known is but days away so it goes without saying that we're bringing you a sneak peek of GTA IV: The Lost and the Damned. And speaking of DLC we also bring you our verdict on Fable II: Knothole Island.

We also have previews of Mafia 2, Dark Void, Godfather II, Eat Lead and the mighty Chronicles of Riddick 2: Assault on Dark Athena. Like I say something for everyone...

On the reviews side things have been a little quiet this month, but Dynasty Warriors: Gundam 2 should keep you busy if you're in the market for a new title.

Enjoy the issue and please do keep on sending me your thoughts and suggestions...

360Zine FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of the new issue

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
360zine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Chris Schilling
Lost and Damned



Steve Hill
Eating Lead



Will Porter
Chronicling Riddick



GUNDAM 2
Reviewed & rated

Don't miss! This month's top highlights



Grand Theft Auto IV: The Lost and Damned

IT'S THE DLC OF THE DECADE



Godfather II

Another superior sequel?



Eat Lead

Preview & interview



The Chronicles of Riddick 2

Hands-on preview inside...

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QUICK FINDER 
Every game's just a click away!

Mafia 2	Eat Lead
Call of Juarez:	The Chronicles of
Bound in Blood	Riddick: Assault on
Dark Void	Dark Athena
Grand Theft Auto:	Dynasty Warriors:
The Lost and	GUNDAM 2
Damned	Fable II: Knothole
Godfather II	Island



**MAFIA II**

Publisher: 2K Games

Developer: 2K Czech

Heritage: Mafia

Link: www.mafia2game.com/home.html

ETA: Autumn



We don't anticipate too many changes in the control mechanics, with the original arguably offering more solid vehicle and weapon handling than GTA.



"Mafia 2 promises a dark-hearted look at the American Dream, examining the harsh realities of mob life"

Mafia 2 is rich with period detail – hopefully that won't be at the cost of a smooth frame-rate, but 2K Czech is confident in its proprietary game engine.



It certainly looks the part, but then the original was no slouch in the graphics department.

FIRST LOOK

Mafia 2

An offer you'll find hard to refuse

What's the story?

It's the rags-to-not-quite-riches story of Vito, an Italian-American immigrant, whose poverty-stricken situation leads him to temptation when he's offered a new way of life. But is a life of organised crime really the way forward for Vito and his friend Joe? And can the pair cut it as little fish in a big pond? Mafia 2 promises a dark-hearted look at the American Dream, examining the harsh realities of mob life as well as embracing the more glamorous side.

What do we know?

Mafia was a curiously underpraised free-roamer – the PC version was undoubtedly the best of the bunch, but even the oft-criticised console ports (well, the Xbox version at least) were hugely enjoyable, offering a storyline of rare intelligence and genuine maturity. Moreover, it seemed to really capture the atmosphere of the time, and with the sequel offering a seamless gameworld – transitions between outdoor and indoor locations won't require any loading time – and a script from the writer of the first game, we're hopeful this can improve on an already pretty fine original.

When do we get more?

It's not due out until the autumn, but we'll hopefully be previewing the game in detail before then. Don't expect a pre-release demo, though.

Anything else to declare?

While underrated by critics, the original Mafia sold over 2 million copies. 2K will undoubtedly be hoping this does even better.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Mafia 2



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CONTROL ➔





Previews

CALL OF JUAREZ
BOUND IN BLOOD

Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Techland
Heritage: Call of Juarez, Chrome
Link: www.callofjuarez.com
ETA: Q2



Juarez had some of the shortest but most exciting boss battles in the business.



Some felt the original's stealth sections were lacking compared to the more action-packed stages, but we felt they provided an atmospheric build-up to the violent release of Ray's levels.



Not everyone was happy with another increase in train fares...



"Juarez mixed stealth-based sequences with brutal six-shooter blasting"

FIRST LOOK

Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

The West just got wilder

What's the story?

The first Juarez was a hugely underrated (though not by us) Wild West FPS, in which players controlled two very different characters through a bloodily violent quest for revenge. This prequel takes us back to Civil War-era Georgia, and eventually winds up in Mexico, with another two protagonists – the brothers McCall – finding themselves in dramatic slo-mo shootouts among the Aztec ruins.

What do we know?

The original really captured the atmosphere of the Old West, and while we are a little disappointed that developer Techland will have to shelve development of intriguing zombie title Dead Island to make this, it's definitely near the top of our Most Wanted list of sequels. Juarez mixed stealth-based sequences with brutal six-shooter blasting, with its slow-motion gunplay among several great ideas the game pulled off with aplomb. With the chance to rectify the first game's few failings, we're hoping for big things from this talented Polish team.

When do we get more?

Ubisoft's release schedule has this down for a release in the second quarter of 2009, so expect it to arrive around April/May time.

Anything else to declare?

The first game switched between hunter and hunted, and we're predicting that the second game might just follow a similar template – from the first render provided by Ubisoft, the two brothers could well be two sides of the same coin.

PREVIEW
FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Call of Juarez



Previews



Publisher: Capcom

Developer: Airtight Games

Heritage: N/A

Link: http://shop.capcom.com/store/capcomus/en_US/DisplayProductDetailsPage/productID.105197700

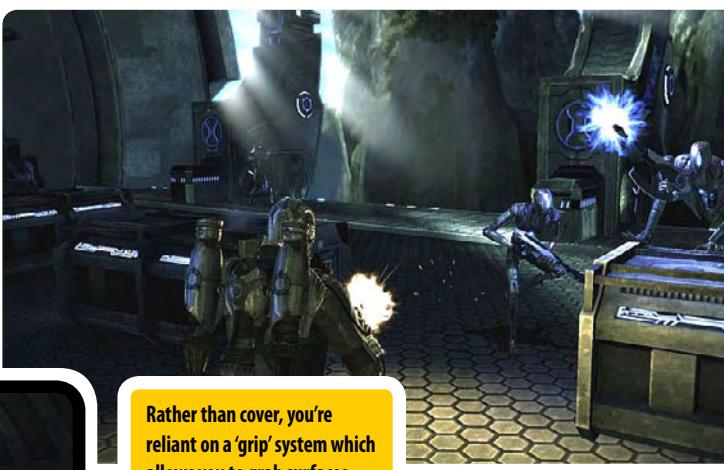
ETA: TBA 2009



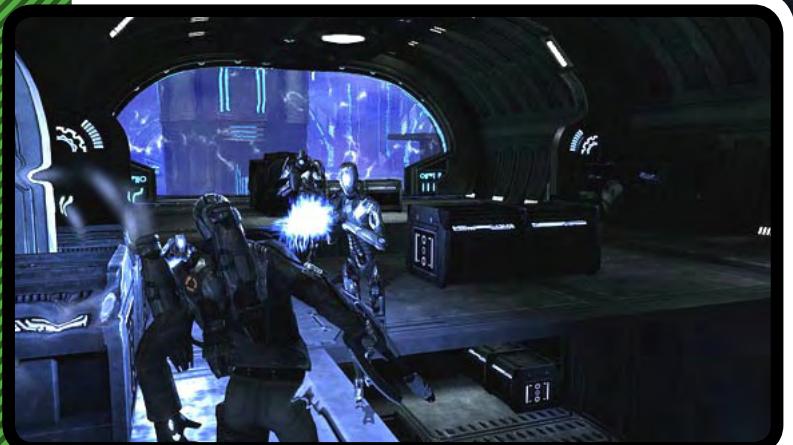
Hero Will has two jetpacks – a hover pack and a rocket pack – which allow him to take to the air at any time.



See what we mean about vertical?



Rather than cover, you're reliant on a 'grip' system which allows you to grab surfaces.



"The unique point to Dark Void is that its combat is more vertically inclined than horizontally"

FIRST LOOK

Dark Void

The third-person shooter goes vertical

What's the story?

In what sounds suspiciously like a plot twist from Lost, a pilot crashes his plane in the Bermuda Triangle, which transports him to a parallel universe known only as The Void. Joining up with a mysterious group known as The Other... er, we mean The Survivors, you have to fight against a group of aliens hell-bent on (guess what?) taking over the Earth.

What do we know?

Third-person shooters are often – and with very good reason – compared immediately to Gears of War. Yet Dark Void offers something a little different from the by-now traditional running and gunning, stopping and popping. Its USP is that its combat (and for that matter its level design) is more vertically inclined than horizontally. Can't find cover? Simply hang from your fingertips above a sheer drop of a thousand feet. Bored of on-foot blasting? Take to the air. You can scale walls while blasting, too – if Dark Void does owe a small debt to Epic's blockbuster, then the Prince of Persia might be asking for a handful of change, too.

When do we get more?

Vaguely pencilled in for a Q1 release date in the US (before being hurriedly TippExed out, no doubt) it now belongs to the launch wasteland known as 'TBA'. We're mildly excited about this one though, so will bring you more as soon as we can.

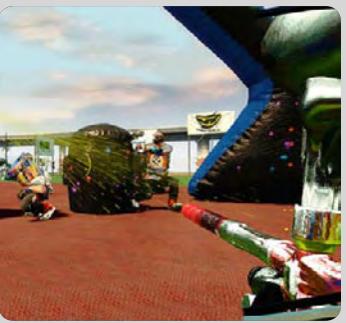
Anything else to declare?

You can 'skyjack' UFOs in mid-flight, so if that's not at least piqued your interest slightly, then we really don't know what will.

PREVIEW
FEEDBACK!
Click here to
tell us what
you think of
Dark Void

INCOMING

A fistful of top new titles coming to 360...



Millennium Series Championship Paintball

Publisher: Activision Blizzard | **ETA:** 13th March

If you're a fan of FPSes but blanch at the sight of blood then virtual paintball is for you. Its player movements are similar to Mirror's Edge, offering more manoeuvrability than your average multiplayer shooter.



UFC 2009 Undisputed

Publisher: THQ | **ETA:** Spring

Whatever your view of UFC, there's no denying this is the best-looking representation of the event to date, with each punch and kick more intensely felt than ever, thanks to authentic flesh-rippling whenever you connect with your opponent. Ouch. With 80 fighters across five weight classes, there's plenty to keep fight fans busy.



Wheelman

Publisher: THQ | **ETA:** 20th March

Pushed back a month to 'provide a more optimal launch time-frame', Wheelman is the slightly lesser-known of Vin Diesel's two Q1 releases. But Diesel loves his games, and we're sure he wouldn't associate himself with a stinker. Indeed, such is the confidence in the game that the movie rights have already been sold. Could the gravel-throated one be headlining two classics this year?

Secret Service

Publisher: Activision Blizzard | **ETA:** 13th March

Spy-themed shooters are all the rage at the moment, and here's another one. Secret Service sees you stepping into the suit and shoes of – surprise, surprise – a secret service agent, after an extremist assault on America's capital. As if it couldn't get any more 24, it turns out security has been compromised. A mole in the president's inner circle? Surely not...



Mini Ninjas

Publisher: Eidos | **ETA:** Autumn

Something of a departure from Ilo Interactive, creator of mature actioners like the Hitman series. Mini Ninjas sees you taking control of Hiro, a Lilliputian martial artist who has to rescue his kingdom from the Evil Samurai Warlord. Ilo certainly knows its stealth, making it the ideal developer to capture the world of the ninja in miniature.



Clover

Publisher: Binary Tweed | **ETA:** Quarter 1

Platform-puzzler Clover (from the Microsoft Xbox Live Community Games service) is likely to win over fans of Jonathan Blow's superb Braid, while its gameplay – which the official press release describes as reminiscent of Fantastic Dizzy – will undoubtedly appeal to retro-heads. "A bit like old games, but better" is the Binary Tweed motto.

UPCOMING

FEBRUARY

- Bolt – 13th February
- The Godfather II – 27th February

MARCH

- Monsters vs Aliens – March
- Rock Revolution – March

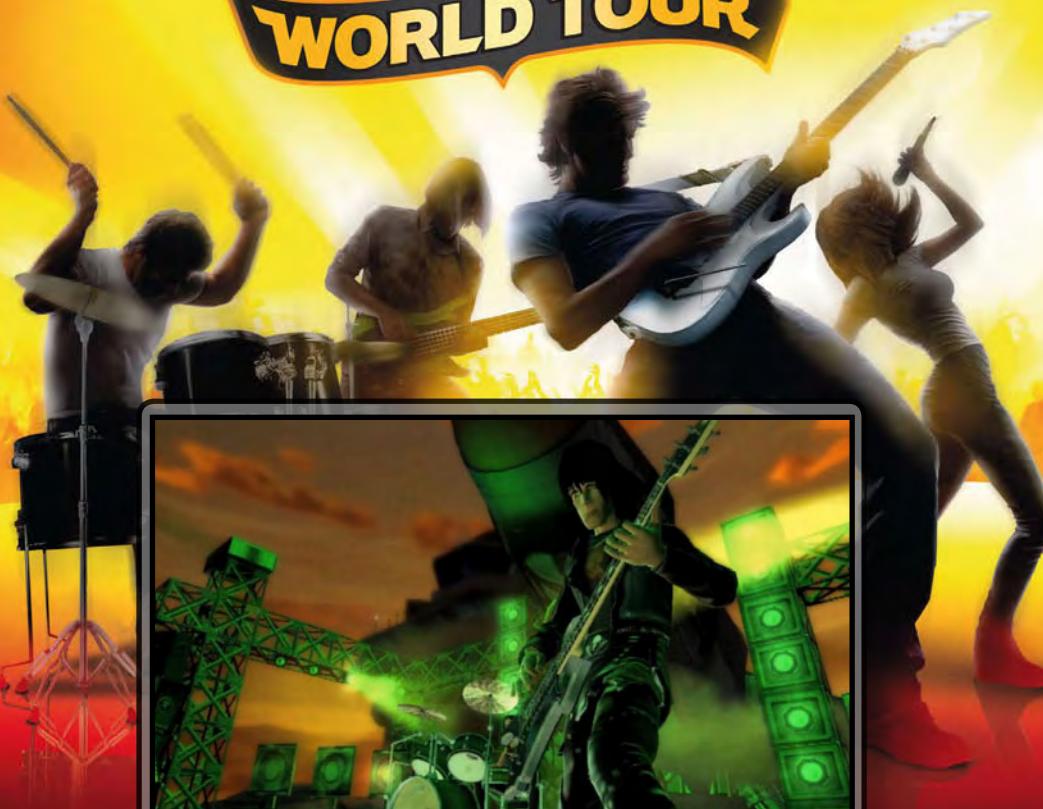
APRIL/MAY

- Champions Online – April
- Hannah Montana: The Movie Game – 8th May

SUMMER

- Harry Potter: THBP – Summer
- Ghostbusters – 19th June

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PlayStation 2



PlayStation 3



XBOX 360 LIVE



Wii



Neverland



Vicarious Visions



Ubisoft



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CONTROL ➔





Publisher: Rockstar Games

Developer: Rockstar North

Heritage: GTA series,
ManhuntLink: www.rockstargames.com/thelostanddamned

ETA: 17th February

HANDS ON

Grand Theft Auto: The lost and Damned

Get your motor runnin'...

The backlash has already begun. When GTA IV arrived in April of last year, it was heralded as one of the great videogames of 2008. Then the Internet suddenly collectively decided it wasn't all that, leading to some ridiculous counter-claims that it was one of the worst games of the

year. While admittedly some of us were so sucked into the immaculately constructed world Rockstar had created that we were a little forgiving of the occasional flaws and sometimes lacklustre missions, it was still an incredible achievement, and a defining moment in modern videogaming.

"The Lost and Damned is the most substantial single piece of downloadable content ever devised"

Following a tag seems incongruously gamey given the almost nonexistent hub, but it's an element which keeps your attention during those long rides between missions.



In its own way, The Lost and Damned is equally significant, representing the most substantial single piece of downloadable content ever devised. Offering more playtime than most full games, its 15-hours plus of new missions, characters, weapons, vehicles and more seem well worth the faintly obscene amount Microsoft paid for exclusive rights to the DLC.

Our one main criticism of GTA IV was that its gameplay often seemed entirely at odds with its story – or rather that of its protagonist, Niko Bellic. Niko had arrived in Liberty City, determined to make a fresh start, and reluctant to get drawn into the seedy criminal



Leader Billy clearly hasn't been rehabilitated by his time in prison.

underworld, yet the internal conflicts the character suffered in the game's cut-scenes jarred against the mayhem he could unleash on the streets. While more players may have been reluctant to engage in the sort of violent chaos which GTA has made its reputation on, the necessary lapses into cop murder in the later missions seemed ill-fitting given the way Niko had developed as a character. So it's pleasing to see that the adventures of The Lost and

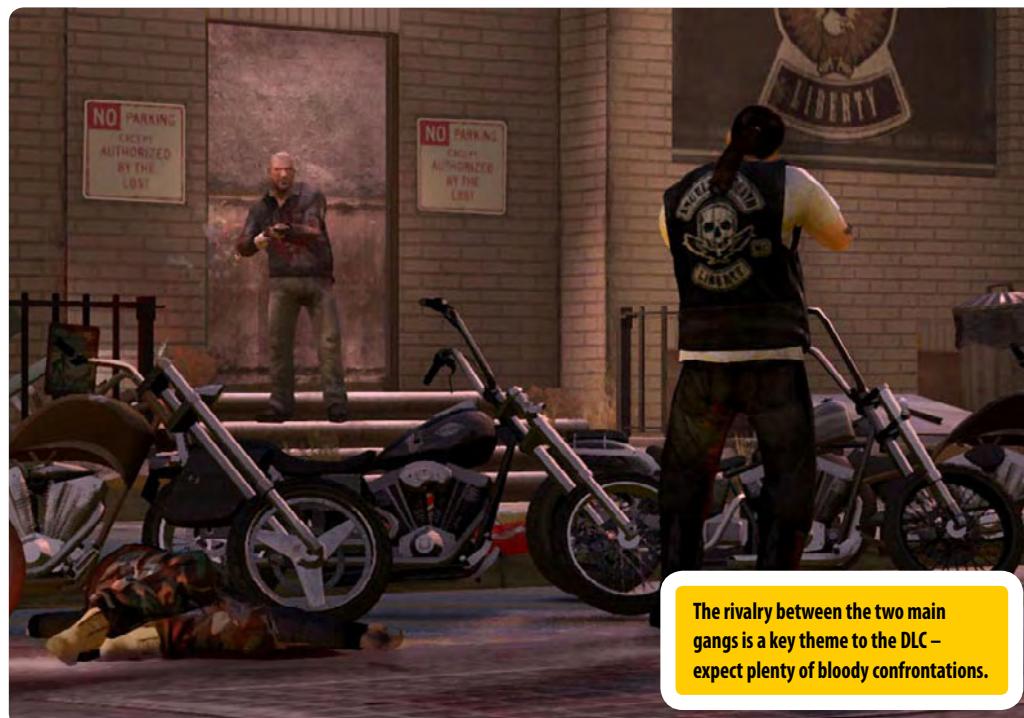




Though the city is familiar, some locations will be new.



While bike handling in IV was a little loose, Johnny's heavyweight ride feels closer to four wheels than two – slightly more manoeuvrable than a car but more substantial than GTA's other bikes.



The rivalry between the two main gangs is a key theme to the DLC – expect plenty of bloody confrontations.

> The Lost and Damned

continued

Damned's anti-hero, biker Johnny Klebitz (who showed up in a brief cameo in IV) seem to fit the GTA template considerably better.

That's not to say that Klebitz is some unthinking goon, however – as deputy leader of biker gang The Lost, he has problems of his own to deal with when gang leader Billy returns. In Billy's absence, Johnny's leadership has been a rather more peaceful reign, convincing his buddies to act more peacefully, and make their way by selling crack, rather than cracking skulls.

Naturally, this causes tensions within the gang, and presumably several violent confrontations – it's likely that some of The Lost won't be around by the time the credits roll, that's for sure.

The game's structure will be fairly similar, though whereas Niko was a lone wolf, Johnny has his biker pals joining him throughout – both on the road and off, providing handy backup when deals go awry and things take a turn for the bloody. In an attempt to create a sense of camaraderie with your tribe, you'll be encouraged to ride in formation by following an icon while riding, which increases your energy, while keeping buddies alive in battle





> The Lost and Damned

continued

results in them becoming harder to kill in future missions. Certain crew members are expendable, though – and can be replaced by newcomers whose abilities might not compare, but



A suite of new weapons allows Johnny and chums to create more mayhem than Niko managed in his stories.



Rockstar has always woven a compelling tale. Only time will tell if Johnny Klebitz becomes as well-liked as Niko Bellic.

may just draw the attention of enough enemies to help you out in gunfights. Talking of guns, Rockstar has thrown in a couple of new weapons to spice things up – a grenade launcher and a sawn-off shotgun, both of which are devastating in their own ways, the latter particularly handy as a deterrent to those chasing you while you're riding. But new guns and vehicles aren't all that's on offer – certain buildings which were previously closed to Niko will now be accessible, offering new interiors to explore and characters to meet – including a bar which acts as the unofficial base of The Lost. There are noticeable graphical tweaks, too – like a grainy filter on the action, some signs of wear and tear on the in-game radar, and a new-look phone. Even the font used throughout fits the biker look perfectly.

Who's the boss?

Rockstar reckons that The Lost and Damned is around a third of the length of GTA IV's story, and with around 20 missions to work your way through, we believe that claim. While in some ways it's disappointing that we're not going to see a brand new island – hinted at in the main game, perhaps that's best saved for the next batch of DLC. After all, there are still plenty of sights and sounds to experience in Liberty City, and viewed through another pair of eyes – and over the handlebars of a powerful two-wheeler – it almost seems as fresh as the first time Niko stepped off the boat. ●



Johnny's story crosses over with Niko's during one mission, the latter heading upstairs to safety while the former deals with an incoming SWAT team downstairs.



Those who felt GTA's new, more sombre tone was at odds with the chaotic, explosive gameplay of old will be pleased to know there are far more opportunities to cut loose this time.

PREVIEW
FEEDBACK!
Click here to
tell us what
you think
of The Lost
and Damned

360Zine



HOW COMPLETE?

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%

Easy riders and raging bulls

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◀ CONTROL ➡





Publisher: EA

Developer: EA Redwood

Shores

Heritage: Many, including the recent release, Dead Space

Link: www.ea.com/godfather2

ETA: 27th February

HANDS ON

Godfather II

Last time it made an offer, we politely refused. This time we welcome it with open arms

A quarter of an hour into the original Godfather game you were being taught how to take over a rival family's business through the medium of throwing a pudgy butcher around his shop. This time round, your first port of call is a velvet-strewn brothel, with two pertly presented topless Eastern European twins and a pimp that needs kneeing in the groin and shaking around a lot. This is one of the first signs that the previous game's tacit adherence to the weight, grime and realism of the Godfather movies has hit the wayside.

Original gangster

From the ground up, Godfather II is an intricately built videogame first and foremost, and a Coppola homage a distant second. It isn't sacrilege, it's just an admission that the initial ports of call for a videogame are to be fun, clever and if at all possible to have a high nudity quotient within the tutorial stages. Thankfully, all those boxes appear to have been ticked.

The game opens, however, with the primary Mafia families having

"From the ground up, Godfather II is an intricately built videogame"



FRIENDLY FAVOURS

You scratch my back, I'll shoot theirs...

From time to time you'll bump into various corrupt officials – all of whom will need a little job doing for them. Do so and you'll end up clutching a variety of cards to your chest – call in a favour from the hospital and your men will return quicker, nudge a trade unionist and he'll give you access to a property you have an eye on. Best of all, some NPCs will return favours with the kill condition for rival family characters – do a task for them and you could nudge an enemy's Made Man right out of the game.





Previews



Godfather II is set in a time period in which tucked-in shirts were highly fashionable.



Dominic and his men look moody in front of the game's genuinely excellent flame and smoke effects.



SIZE MATTERS NOT

Not how big it is, what you do with it...

So how do the game's three cities size up when compared to the original's expansive Big Apple? "In terms of overall geography, it's probably a little bit tighter in scale than the first game," explains *Godfather II*'s Executive Producer, Hunter Smith. "But what with the way you interact with the environment though, now that you can climb on rooftops and go anywhere, the playable square footage is greater. We're trying to focus on more gameplay, and far less on commuting!"

> **Godfather II** continued

the celebrations for their successful claim on Cuba's criminal activities rudely interrupted by revolution, death and a sequence of reminders as to how you, Dominic, can shoot people in the head. After this, New York opens up to you as a newly crowned Don – which will be closely followed by cityscapes in Miami and Havana.

"In *Godfather I* you were an outsider working your way up through the ranks, then you became the Don and the game was over," explained Executive Producer Hunter Smith when 360Zine met up with him for a quick chat. "For this one we felt it needed to be about the *Godfather* entirely. With you just saying 'I want to be the Don. I want to make the decisions about what's going on.'"

The decisions you make, then, are strategic ones as you expand your criminal empire at the expense of the five rival families. Clearly there's a lot of GTA-style violent mischief that you can get up to yourself – performing executions on foes, throwing petrol bombs and shooting at the furniture in whorehouse... However, on top of this is the hiring of guards, the making of Made Men and the co-ordinated assaults on rivals' turf.

Don with a view

To aid with the mischief making is a new feature called the Don's View – a beautifully constructed map of your current environs where you can, for example, order your men to leave a bomb at an enemy chop-shop, taking it out of play for a while. This ensures that the rival family can't make any money

"To aid with the mischief making is a new feature called the Don's View – a map of your current environs"

from it, lose the gameplay bonus they receive from owning the entire chop-shop crime ring and puts a bunch of their best goons in the hospital.

"Thing is, this time the other families are playing the game of organised crime too," explains Hunter Smith, having been roughed up a little. "They're trying to take certain sets of rackets to make a crime ring – they want them, they know you have them and they know how well guarded they are." As such you'll have to ensure that you've got your most precious assets





Previews



The Don's View: Potentially the most violent board game you'll ever play.

"When attacking an enemy operation in person there's a variety of ways to go about it"

FAMILY AFFAIRS

Never go into business with your relatives...

The mobster you play, Dominic, takes over the position of Don when the main character from the previous game, one Aldo Trepani, is rudely bullet-ridden in the opening scenes of the game. In terms of your Mafia cohorts, their cut-scenes are again extremely well done – with Robert Duvall again donating his vocal talents as Tom Hagen in exchange for a few wads of cash. Still no Al Pacino, though. It seems he somewhat backed the wrong horse when giving his facial features to the dead-and-buried Scarface game...

> **Godfather II** continued

guarded by your most trusted (and most upgraded) men. At a basic level it feels like Monopoly with guns, and can have outcomes equally as violent.

When attacking an enemy operation in person there's a variety of ways to go about it, depending on who you bring with you. A Made Man arsonist (already able to handle about five average guards on his own) will be able to smoke the enemy out of a building, while medics will heal, and demo experts blow holes in walls. Engineers, meanwhile, will be able to knock out the phonelines and ensure that goons under attack won't be able to either call for reinforcements or the boys in blue. With all your cohorts eminently upgradable through cash, the weapons you've discovered around the map,

how well you fare online and general crime ring ownership, it's a system that gets deeper the more you play – yet thankfully rarely becomes confusing.

Once you and your men have carved their way through the defences of the asset you've got your eye on then the old shakedown mechanic from the previous games kicks in. It's slightly incongruous, in that you'd think you could persuade the owner of the desired joint to come over to your side by simply pointing at the trail of dead bodies that you've left in your wake, but throwing him around through determined twiddling of your thumbsticks remains as intuitive and as enjoyable as it was before. Get to your victim's sweet spot (a bit like Fable 2's marriage system, only with more dangling over ledges) and the place, and its benefits, are yours.

Everyone, even people that haven't seen it, will tell you that Godfather Part II is a superior film to Francis Ford Coppola's original magnum opus.



Everything in the game, from the buildings to the cars, is accurate to the time it's set in.

When it comes to the games, this just isn't a challenge – yet EA have potentially created, out of a desert of non-expectation and vague interest, a game that finally takes the GTA-like genre out of the realms of half-implemented ideas. If you're asked to be a Made Man, it'd be wise to say yes. ●



One down...
several to go.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Godfather II

360Zine



HOW COMPLETE?

95%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

85%

Like the second film, this should be a superior effort



HANDS ON

Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard

Don't call it a comeback...

Matt Hazard is back. You remember, Matt Hazard, star of such gaming touchstones as The Adventures of Matt in Hazard Land, A Fistful of Hazard, and the pioneering Matt Hazard 3D. Admittedly things took a downturn with the generic Haz-Matt Carts, but Murder Force was something of a return to form, and the understated You Only Live 1317 Times was definitely an underrated gem.

Never heard of them? Of course you haven't. It's a joke, and a laboured one at that, with Eat Lead's lengthy marketing campaign consisting of creating an entirely fictitious back catalogue of games – and indeed personal life – for Matt. There was even a rumour that he may have been more than close friends with Lara Croft...

It's a reasonably neat conceit, and does actually have some relevance to the game, as in the fiction of Eat Lead, Matt Hazard is a washed-up 80s



Behind yoooo!

"In the fiction of Eat Lead, Matt Hazard is a washed-up 80s videogame character attempting a comeback"



Digital effects remind you you're in a videogame.



It's the Butchers versus the Mitchells...



It was hardly a fair fight – pistol versus machine gun?

videogame character attempting to make a successful comeback after his long-time employers Marathon Megasoft are bought out. A highly self-referential affair, Matt is fully aware that he's in a game and reacts accordingly. However, it appears that someone is

hacking into the game to finally kill off Matt, forcing him to face an array of foes from videogames past. The hacking back-story essentially gives the developers *carte blanche* to throw Matt into any scenario of their choosing, so it makes perfect sense





"It's a largely blood-free affair, albeit one that's not short on action"



> Eat Lead continued

for him to be shooting gunslingers in a Western one minute, and then facing hordes of slavering zombies the next.

The set-up also enables some affectionate mocking of ancient

videogames, and it takes a mildly humorous sideswipe at all manner of genres, as well as referencing pop culture in general. Part of the niche genre of comedy-based videogames, Eat Lead has been written by industry veteran Dave Ellis, who won the Writer's



Guild of America Award for his work on PSP title Dead Head Fred. And in further comedy showbiz news, there is some voice acting from Will Arnett (30 Rock, Arrested Development) and Neil Patrick Harris (Harold & Kumar go to White Castle, How I Met Your Mother).

Dukes of Hazard

Lovely stuff, but what about the game itself? In a nutshell, it's a cover-based third-person shooter, with Matt ducking from object to object while firing off a slew of weapons, or indulging in some close combat with a variety of melee attacks. In keeping with the comedy vibe, it's a largely blood-free affair, albeit one that is not short on action, unsurprising given that Matt Hazard is essentially a pastiche of an action hero – rocking the bald space marine look with some style. And if you

think hard about it, his name – and indeed story – could be a thinly veiled reference to missing game character Duke Nukem. In fact, part of the marketing campaign consisted of a behind the scenes exposé of a depressed and unemployed Matt Hazard sat on his couch watching TV.

Unlike Duke Nukem, there is actually a game though, and in

This is what happens when Waitrose runs out of organic beef.



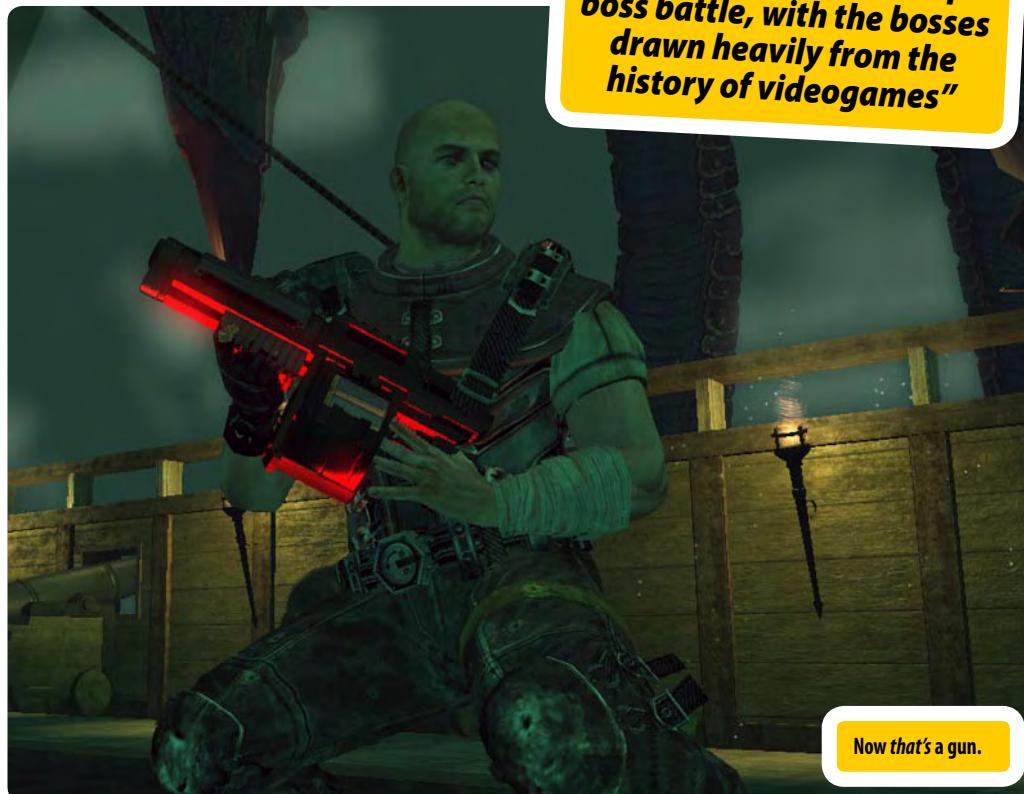


Previews



The Western levels are a highlight.

"In classic retro fashion, each level ends with an epic boss battle, with the bosses drawn heavily from the history of videogames"



Now that's a gun.

> Eat Lead continued

another nod to videogame clichés Matt is accompanied throughout the game by the obligatory detached female hologram. Her name is QA, and she sees the world through a camera mounted on Matt's shoulder, guiding him through the game in the standard asexual manner, as well as proving a foil to his corny one-liners. As for the structure, it's single-player only, with an action-packed romp through eight levels of parody, featuring such colourful characters as Master Chef (geddit?), Captain Carpenter, Sting Sniperscope and Sonny Tang, all of who may or may not bear likeness to actual game characters.

Who's the boss?

In classic retro fashion, each level ends with an epic boss battle, with the bosses again drawn heavily from the history of videogames. For instance, at the end of level six, Matt comes up against the estimable Altos Tratus, a character plucked from the annals of classic Japanese role-playing games. Or according to Eat Lead, from the famous Penultimate Illusion series, which you probably don't need to be told is a nod to the seemingly interminable Final Fantasy franchise. As Matt shrewdly



Your hologram sidekick watches the action through a camera on your shoulder.

points out, despite about 50 games the characters still haven't learnt to speak, instead relying on reams of text, a trait that Altos Tratus ably displays. This boss battle also features what may be the only gag ever made about an ellipsis, the three dots (...) that in role-playing games passes for a conversation.

It's vaguely amusing fare, with further bosses and hijinks promised in the final version. Eat Lead will ultimately be judged on its gameplay, but if it can provide a little light relief in what is too often a po-faced genre, then it will be a very welcome addition to the gaming landscape. At the very least, it will keep Matt Hazard in work for a little longer, and we suspect that's a very good thing indeed... ●

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Eat Lead

360Zine



HOW COMPLETE?

90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

A funny action game? This genre-buster could be cool

LEADING QUESTIONS

We feed some questions to **Joe Fletcher**, Associate Producer of Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard



Videogames aren't traditionally a medium for comedy. Do you think there should be comedy in games?

Well, I think there's a place for it. I wouldn't say that all videogames should be comedic, in as much as I wouldn't say all movies should be comedic. But yes, there's definitely a place for it in games, and that's one of the strong points of this game itself, the comedy aspect; the parody aspect.

Historically, what are the landmark comedy games that you think have worked?

Definitely Monkey Island, but there's other kinds of dark comedy-type games. Stubbs the Zombie was one that came out fairly recently that definitely has comedic factors. Space

Ace is another, and even games like King's Quest had a lot more satire than most. If you want to go down that route then the Discworld games, too.

A lot of the stuff you're parodying is based on ancient videogames. Do you think younger gamers are going to get the jokes? >





"There's enough comedy – not only in the videogame in-jokes but general pop culture too – for everyone"



> Interview continued

There's other games that are parodied, either in that it looks like a certain character, or amalgamations like Altos Tratus, where you can tell he's an RPG hero but he's not really anything in particular. But there's a large breadth of parody and humour from different gaming times and console generations.

You've gone for the bald space marine look. Is that a nod to Duke Nukem or simply every action hero?

Again, that's sort of an amalgamation. We actually looked at designs of all these different characters, different games and genres and first-person shooters, and we wanted to go for something instantly recognisable like the built-up marine look. But it isn't a parody of one particular character.

Has there been any feedback from people who think you've gone too close to the bone?

I'm not sure. I do know that when we've been working on it we've made sure that anything that we parodied is most definitely parody. While it's close, it's far enough on this side of the line.

Are there laws in place about this kind of thing?

There are parody laws and we've worked closely with the legal team. Early in level six there's this character called Captain Carpenter, who's fairly close to a certain side-scrolling plumber character. You can see the direct parody we're working on, so you can definitely see where it's come from.

We saw the RPG boss. Are there any other details of specific bosses you can mention?

The other two we've revealed are the Tentacle Beast, which involves a huge epic fight with a huge tentacled monster on a boat. And General Neutrino, who is the archetypal Bond villain. He's a Russian soldier to the core, all the way back to the Cold War. He's from Matt's old 80s games, when that was what was going on in the world.

Finally, do you think anyone's going to take it seriously?

I think it's got a very strong base. It's a third-person shooter and there's definitely a market for it there. And it's got a really strong setting; it's got its own feel to it, all by itself. Along with that, it's got that whole nostalgia factor which I think is going to draw a lot of people in. One person's going to play the game and it's going to be a word-of-mouth sort of thing. There's enough comedy – not only in the videogame in-jokes, but just general pop culture too – for everyone. ●



Publisher: D3 Publisher

Developer: Vicious

Cycle Software

Heritage: Robotech:

Battlecry

Link: www.eatleadvideogame.com

ETA: March 2009



Joe Fletcher,
Associate Producer,
Vicious Cycle Software



Publisher: Atari
 Developer: Starbreeze
 Heritage: The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay, The Darkness
 Link: <http://atari.com/riddick>
 ETA: 20th March

HANDS ON

The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

Sublime, not Riddick-ulous...

Riddick rasps: "They know I'm here," rasps Riddick, Vin Diesel's gravel-throated delivery reverberating through our TV speakers. "A fearful enemy is one prone to make mistakes." He pauses. "Ones that can be easily exploited." Not long afterwards, he plunges down to kill two enemies

with Ulaks – two large serrated blades which tear through flesh with a horrible squelch. Riddick might be outnumbered, but he's rarely overpowered. And in this sequel to 2004's Xbox smash, he might just have the strength to out-muscle some of the bigger names when it comes to 2009's best FPS.



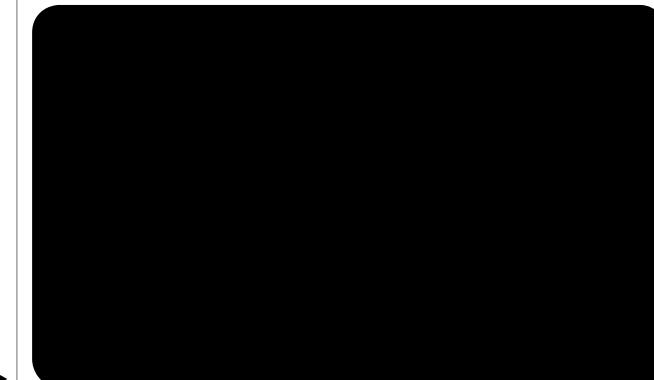
At first Riddick feels a little lightweight, but his speed and manoeuvrability is a real boon in close-quarters combat.

You can count the number of truly effective movie-to-game translations on one hand, and the ones that clearly surpass the film's quality on a single finger. That one digit would represent the original *Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay* – a game far removed from your traditional tie-in, and all the better for it. *Assault on Dark Athena* was originally planned as a hi-def remake of *Butcher Bay* with another level and a multiplayer mode. But developer Starbreeze must have had some pretty good ideas for fresh content because that was scrapped and we now have an entirely new campaign, plus the remake, and a suite of multiplayer modes – all in one value-stuffed package.

In truth, *Dark Athena* –like *Butcher Bay* before it – is far from a traditional shooter. Riddick doesn't get his sizeable mitts on a gun until over an hour in, and the first shots you'll fire in anger aren't from a weapon held by the



There's some simple platforming involved in making your way around the Athena.





The fighting is urgent and brutal, with plenty of blood spilt, particularly if you're using a combat knife or the Ulaks.



Where possible, it's best to tackle one enemy at a time – drag corpses into the shadows to avoid alerting further troops.



Enemies often yell insults with real venom – dialogue isn't so much delivered as hurled.

> The Chronicles of Riddick

continued

goggle-wearing anti-hero. Instead, you start by sneaking around the ship's interiors, waiting for your moment to pounce with the unfeasibly pointy hairpin you've managed to secretly steal from Revas, the hard-nosed female officer in charge. Your initial opponents are Drones – patrolling sentries whose clumsy, clockwork actions reveal they're no longer recognisably human, with their weapons welded to their suits. They're almost reminiscent of Bioshock's Big Daddies, and you'll feel a tinge of

sympathy when you use the Ulaks to gouge huge chunks of flesh from their faces. Better still, their familiar movement patterns make them ideal for the game's stealth kills – manage to reach them unnoticed while their backs are turned, and a quick left-trigger, right-trigger combo will take them out quickly and quietly. Once down, you can grab their weapon, but only if you hoist the Drone to his feet. They're heavy brutes, so you'll barely be able to move while firing, and so encounters with more than one Drone can see you breathlessly sprinting between their corpses as your clip runs out with no way of reloading. While they're not the >

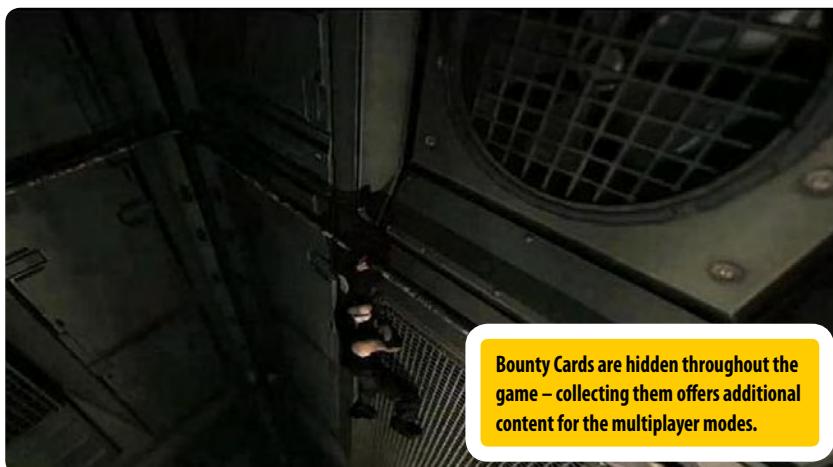
> **The Chronicles of Riddick**

continued

most intelligent opponents you'll face, their bullets can do significant damage, with the four squares representing Riddick's life depleting all too quickly when caught in the open. Energy can

be regained by staying out of trouble for a few seconds, though if Riddick has lost an entire square you can only get that energy back by visiting a NanoMED unit, which replenishes your health in a brisk and rather forceful manner.

One brilliant early set-piece sees Riddick controlling the Drones



remotely, when an ally locks him in the control room after he's been discovered. The view switches to that of the Drone you're controlling, and the game suddenly becomes more like a traditional shooter – the idea being to use as many Drones as necessary to take out the approaching guards and protect the room you're in. Once that's over, you can pick up the weapons they've left behind, and suddenly you can move a little quicker. That's not to say you can't still do a bit of stealthy hunting, but by that stage most players will be itching to cut loose.

In the firing line

The guns certainly don't disappoint – particularly the SMG's staccato purr as it rapidly spits out bullets, while a neat effect sees the gun (and its ammo display) blur in the foreground as you hold the left trigger to zoom in on the enemy. You can also use the environment to your advantage – shooting a glass floor during an encounter with several troops sucks them all down until a metal door blocks the air flow, while one section in the ship's gravity generator sees enemies hurtling to their doom with a few well-placed shots. Should one foe's



progress be halted by a computer terminal, you can always drag his body away and let gravity take its course...

A host of multiplayer options include the Pitch Black mode – players hunt Riddick in an arena with virtually no light, with the successful shooter becoming Riddick – while more traditional Deathmatch and Capture the Flag variants also feature, making this one hell of a package. It might not be on everyone's radar for this year, but Dark Athena, unlike its central character, shouldn't be spending any time in the shadows. ●

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of *The Chronicles of Riddick*

360zine
THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK
ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

HOW COMPLETE?

90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%

Puts most other shooters in the shade



Publisher: Warner Bros.
 Developer: Deadline Games
 Heritage: Total Overdose,
 Chili Con Carnage
 Link: N/A
 ETA: March/April

HANDS ON

Watchmen: The End is Nigh

Justice is coming to all of us. No matter what we do...

It's refreshing to see a publisher allowing a developer a little more rope when developing a tie-in. Rather than rush-release a full game to meet *Watchmen*'s theatrical release date, Total Overdose developer Deadline Games will work on two smaller, downloadable titles – one to launch alongside the film, another with the DVD release. Very sensible.

Although adapting *Watchmen* in the first place could be a little less clever. The celebrated graphic novel is very rich and dense, seemingly ill-suited to a game – indeed, the film itself has had a protracted development, such has been the difficulty in making it fit a standard movie template. Yet, once again, the obvious pitfall has been sidestepped – the game will have a tighter focus, centring on just two of *Watchmen*'s myriad characters, with Rorschach and Nite Owl the two playable ones. Moreover, the game is actually a prequel to the events of the film, so

die-hard fans won't be offended at any liberties the game might have taken with the plot.

Old-school thrills?

That said, some will still be a little perturbed at the form the game has taken. It's a fairly old-school beat-'em-up, with local cooperative play but no online. The two protagonists have their own strengths – Nite Owl is slow but strong, his exceptional technical knowledge enabling him to use high-tech gadgets and bombs. Meanwhile, Rorschach is a little faster but lacking in strength, though his improvisational combat technique makes use of nearby objects as weapons. As well as smacking down hoodlums, the pair must cooperate to solve puzzles that the game periodically throws up. Final Fight with brains? Perhaps. Is that a good thing? It's a little too early to say.

The End is Nigh is being referred to as an 'episode', which will consist of six separate chapters. The two film ➤

Nite Owl's powers are less traditional than the more familiar brawling style of Rorschach.



Rather than forcing players to stay together, the two-player mode splits the action in two.



"Final Fight with brains? Perhaps. Is that a good thing? It's a little too early to say"

He's not the biggest, but Rorschach is certainly strong enough to throw goons bigger than him.



> **Watchmen** continued

actors taking on the roles of Rorschach and Nite Owl – Jackie Earl Haley and Patrick Wilson – lend their vocal talents to the game, though the cut-scenes won't be the usual overblown CGI that's become the accepted norm for tie-ins, instead using animated comic panels to link more closely to the original graphic novel. While the plot is being kept under wraps for the time being, it's known that the game takes place in the Seventies, beginning with a sequence where the crimebusting duo attempt to break into a prison.

Nite Owl and Rorschach are both still present in the single-player game, with one of the two being AI-controlled. The focus is clearly on teamwork, which is why it's even more

surprising that there's no online two-player mode. Granted, we've always preferred local co-op play – no other type of game can quite capture the bond of brawling alongside a mate – but given that the game is downloadable, it seems an even more glaring omission.

Multiplayer quibbles aside, *Watchmen* certainly looks the part – and thanks to the assistance of the Hollywood cast, it sounds perfectly fine, too. Can it overcome the natural limitations of the genre to provide a deep and meaningful experience, though? Or will we be simply enjoying a solid blast of arcadey fun – the sort of experience that we've come to expect from PSN and XBLA? Either will do. Let's just hope it's more *Yakuza* than *Final Fight Streetwise*. ●



Nite Owl has some impressive specials – some of which can cause damage to several enemies at once.



Rorschach is certainly the more agile of the two, able to dance around bad guys in a rather nimble manner.

360Zine

HOW COMPLETE?



90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

75%

A dark and brutal downloadable brawler



CONTROL →



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Dynasty Warriors: GUNDAM 2

Clash of the titans

One of the most quintessentially Japanese videogames ever made, and very likely to be stubbornly misunderstood by the vocal majority, *Dynasty Warriors GUNDAM 2*, given half a chance, could be one of the most pleasant gaming surprises you'll have this year.

The series has long since been dismissed as a thoughtless button-

masher, presumably by reviewers who've spent all of a couple of hours playing the game on Easy. Half an hour into one of GUNDAM's Official mode campaigns (the same story played from several different viewpoints) and that's proven to be an outright lie. Coming up against a large Psycho-GUNDAM – a robot even more ridiculously oversized than the Mobile Suit your current avatar



"GUNDAM 2 sticks fairly rigidly to the *Dynasty Warriors* gameplay template"

is piloting – we attempted to beat it with a mixture of standard attacks and stored-up SP attacks. And got absolutely mullered. Turns out you need to time your assaults so that your charge attack connects just as the Psycho-GUNDAM is about to execute one of his special moves. Given that you have to protect a slightly suicidal ally while defeating this behemoth, you'll need a mixture of tactical planning, excellent reflexes and a cool head to knock him down and start slashing away at his weak points. And, one cut-scene later, you have to take him on again – this time alone.

GUNDAM it

GUNDAM 2 sticks fairly rigidly to the DW gameplay template which has served the franchise so well over the years. So you'll face legions of fairly ineffectual enemies, which can be dismissed with a few brief swipes of your beam sword, each within rectangular portions (or 'fields') within the different levels. Human rivals piloting MSes with similar abilities to



MECHA TON

How *GUNDAM*'s bizarre world works



Friendly fire

Gain ground

Lab series

Friendly fire

Pal up with a fellow pilot by taking on Friendship Missions, and you can sometimes execute ultra-powerful dual attacks – particularly handy when you're dealing with an enemy eight times your size. Tap B to unleash your SP move and occasionally an ally will join in to increase the damage dealt.



Reviews



With numerous ways to customise your MS, you can play the game how you want.

> GUNDAM 2 continued

your own pop up to give you a sterner test, while the occasional huge mech is introduced to spice up proceedings during a few missions. Often you'll simply need to conquer all the enemy-controlled fields to complete the mission, while others require you to shoot down other characters, escape an area, or to eliminate a number of foes within a time limit.

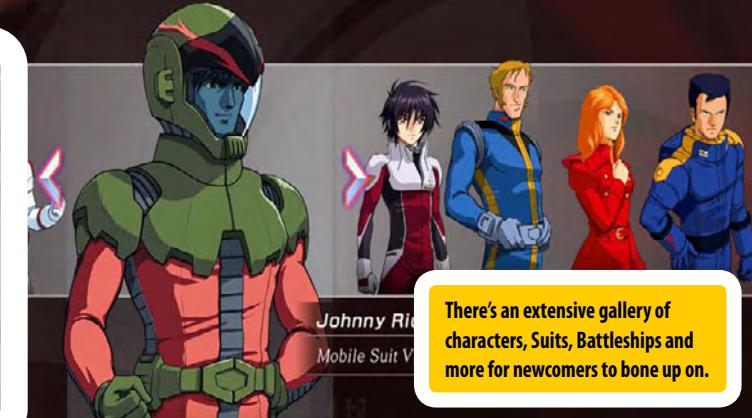
Welcomingly familiar

Combat feels welcomingly familiar, but simultaneously seems more fluid than the standard Dynasty Warriors titles. It might seem surprising that these huge Mobile Suits are more agile than their human counterparts, but their boost power allows you to flit between groups of enemies, chaining combos in a manner that's hugely empowering. It's this element that's always been Dynasty Warriors' trump card, and it feels more gratifying here than ever – the action flows really smoothly, the



The coloured arrows point you in the direction of your nearest rival, or the defence commanders which often have to be defeated to take control of a field.

Character Gallery



There's an extensive gallery of characters, Suits, Battleships and more for newcomers to bone up on.



Amuro has conquered Field A!

SP attacks are still fairly powerful at a low level, but by the time you're handling a larger mech with greater capabilities, these moves are longer and can take out dozens of opponents.



Roll over screen for annotations

> **GUNDAM 2** continued

battlefield – shoot down someone and they might start to distrust you, which can open up a Friendship mission where you have a chance of improving (or worsening) your relationship. Collection Missions offer up parts for specific Suits, while License Missions enable you to pilot alternative Suits. The Mobile Suit Lab offers the opportunity to upgrade existing parts or develop new ones. And aside from that, there are Free Missions and Story Missions which diverge from the anime series. After spending over 20 hours with one character before deciding on a change for the sake of variety, we still hadn't come close to exhausting all his story missions. In short, it's huge.

Baffling story

Despite the claims that the Official Mode offers a way in for GUNDAM newcomers, the numerous characters, baffling plot and incomprehensible relationship shifts don't necessarily make this any more accessible. Its more traditional structure will undoubtedly appeal to some, but it's the expansive Mission Mode where the real gameplay meat can be found. Our advice is to just ignore the story and roll with the confusing plot developments, because this is almost certainly the best starting point for Dynasty Warriors newcomers, while series veterans may just find this to be the most complete and polished entry in the franchise to date. ●

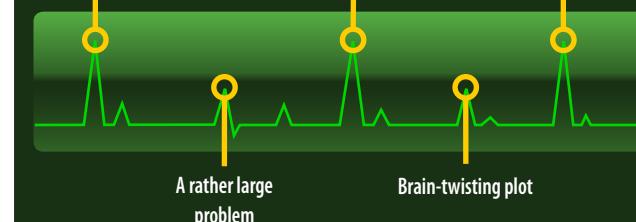
Chris Schilling

PULSOMETER *Signs of life*

Huge robots!

Fighting!

Psyco: The Return

Still playing,
still building**360Zine**
Verdict

Gundam good game

- Combat is rewarding and addictive
- There's masses of content here
- Impenetrable story

86%

Xbox Live Arcade Round-Up

Another thrilling game available for download today...

Fable II: Knothole Island

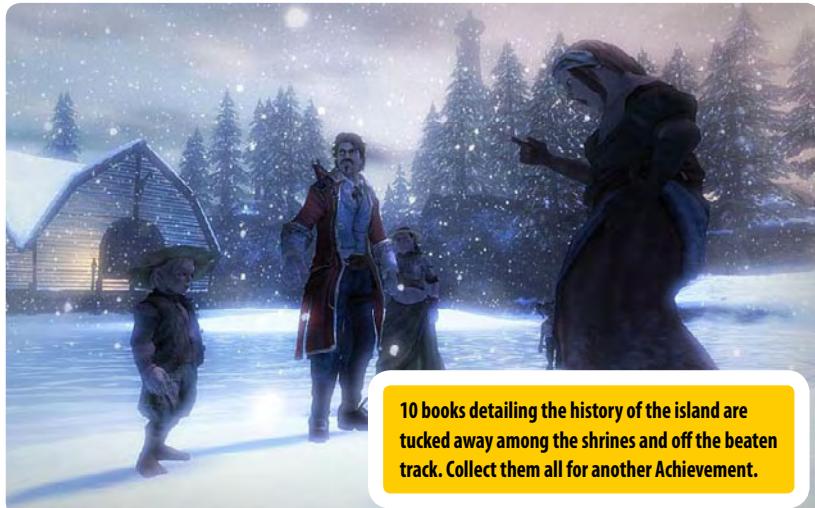
Developer: Lionhead

Publisher: Microsoft Price: 800 MP (~£6.80)

Some people will try and tell you that Knothole Island is just more of the same, but it's really not. As Fable II's first slice of DLC, it represents a notable departure from the main game, with changes both for the better and for the worse.

The setting itself is typically charming and looks lovely. Initially

covered by a blanket of snow, with the delicate flakes falling gently, it's reminiscent of the full game's Dickensian opening. Yet it turns out the residents aren't happy – presumably the heating bills are through the roof – and so you're asked to visit a shrine to put things right. But then the newly arid climate is equally

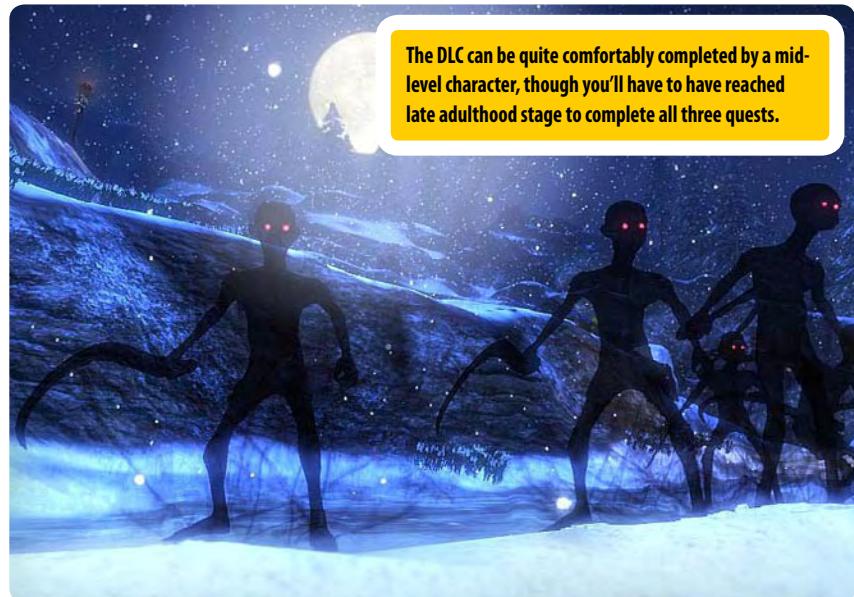


"It's those still exploring Albion who will get the most out of Knothole Island"

irritating to the Knotholians, and you have to repeat the task, with the excessive rain provided by the third change proving just as unpalatable.

While the shrines themselves are enjoyable to conquer, the structure of the quests exacerbates the worst of Fable's foibles. After each, you have to travel back to Albion via boat and then return – at no point is this mentioned, and at first it just seems like another bug. The entertainingly self-aggrandising village Chieftain is another memorable character to add to the roster, but he's only there to spout a few lines before sending you on your merry way. You're on your own for the quests themselves, with no other characters to provide any real flavour, save for the shop owners and the handful of residents who don't offer much in the way of conversation besides comments about the weather.

That said, there are new enemies – shadowy fiends with glowing red eyes – and the puzzles are a little more



intricate than those in the story quest's dungeons. There's nothing particularly taxing – though a couple of the flit-switches will test your reactions – but the change is welcome. And one of the village shops offers something a little different, too – The Box of Secrets contains several mysterious items which can't be bought, but instead traded for items obtained from the mainland. Our favourite of the bunch has to be the Axe of Disharmony – a weapon in the shape of a guitar, though we reckon that the Knothole Knight costume runs it close.

It's those still exploring Albion who'll get the most out of Knothole Island. Played as an epilogue to the adventure, the story is lacking and the quests over all too soon. But viewed as another part of Albion to wander off to as a distraction from the main plot, it's a fine addition to the Fable universe. Next time though, we want more. ●

Beautiful new setting

A host of extra items

Not enough of it

A slight but enjoyable add-on

80%



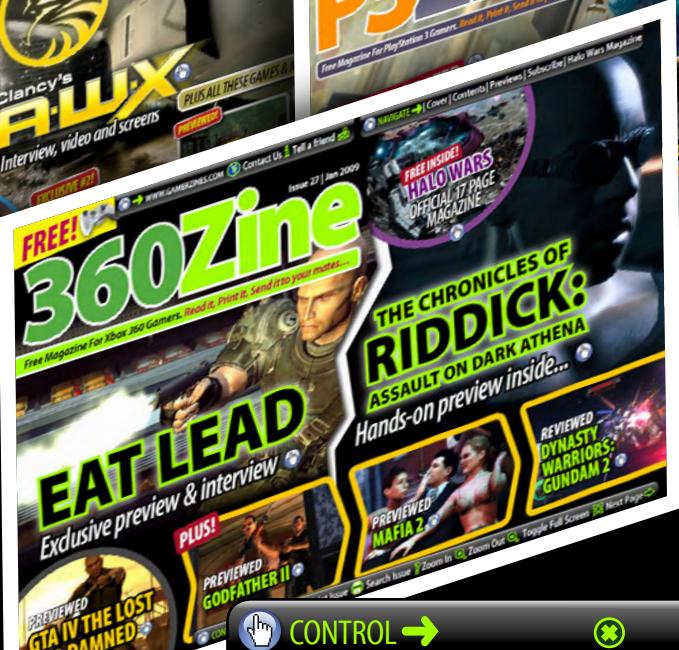
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The screenshot shows the N4G website homepage. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for All, PS3, Xbox 360, Wii, PC, PSP, DS, Mobile, Gaming, Industry, Dev, Tech, More, Blogs, MR, UR, and Forums. The main content area features a 'Hot Stories' section with three thumbnails: 'Nintendo shows their true colors when...' (730 views), 'Update on Big PS3 Exclusive Today' (720 views), and 'X-Play Killzone 2 Review' (650 views). Below this, there's a 'From BADJoystick.com' section with news items like 'Resident Evil 5 - PS3 vs Xbox screenshots...' and 'IGN UK - Killzone 2 Review'. On the right side, there's a forum interface for 'CranberryPub' with a user profile, a search bar, and a sidebar for 'HD Gaming' with a list of products from 'ABE'S OF MARINE CITY' and 'Vann's'.





HALO WARS™

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INTERVIEW

GRAEME DIVINE

The game's lead writer speaks!



FEATURE

MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM

Skirmish mode explained



EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST

HALO WARS™

Everything you need to know about the RTS of the year!



CONTROL



WELCOME

Branching out from a series as popular as Halo is always going to be a difficult undertaking for any developer. You've got the diehard fans concerned that it won't be anything like Halo, and the others hoping that it's going to offer something different. It's testament to Ensemble Studios' skill that *Halo Wars* manages to effortlessly satisfy both groups.

Okay, it's a totally different genre, but this is Halo – its world, its character, its universe, everything looks and feels just right. Warthogs leaping gaps and bounding over rocky terrain, Elites cutting a swathe through UNSC grunts, Locusts and Hunters, Scarabs and Spartans. The only change is that you're viewing them from a totally new perspective. Instead of being in the thick of battle on the surface, you're controlling events from above. But it instantly feels familiar, with exceptional audiovisual detail making those initial steps into new territory seem a whole lot more welcoming for Halo fans.

But it's also been a chance for Ensemble to branch out and explore the universe a little more – you get settings you've never seen in a Halo game, vehicles you've never piloted (or faced off against) and the chance to finish the fight as an army instead of just one man. Oh, and plenty of all-too-fleeting glimpses at how a CGI Halo movie could look in the sublime cut-scenes.

We've spent several enjoyable hours with the game, and this special supplement carries an extensive hands-on playtest which tells you everything you need to know about *Halo Wars*, as well as an interview with Graeme Devine, lead writer at Ensemble Studios.

Enjoy the issue.

Chris Schilling, Editor

*"This supplement will tell you everything you need to know about *Halo Wars*"*

Contents

Playtest

Our massive eight-page hands-on playtest will let you know exactly why this is one of the most exciting Xbox 360 games you'll see this year.

Skirmish mode

How to play multiplayer without having to go online.

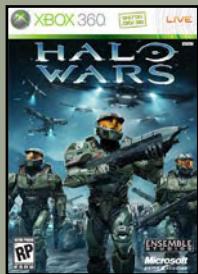
Interview

We talk exclusively to the game's lead writer, Graeme Devine.





HALO
WARS



OFFICIAL PLAYTEST

HALO WARS

Publisher:
Microsoft Game
Studios

Developer:
Ensemble Studios

Heritage:
Age of Empires
series

Link: www.halowars.com

ETA: 27th February

A real-time strategy blockbuster?

The humble RTS has never really worked on consoles, with traditional controllers being no match for mouse and keyboard control. The genre's complexities make porting PC strategy games a near-impossibility – with orders difficult to execute accurately and at speed, menus tricky to navigate and uncommon commands often mapped to unwieldy combinations of buttons.

Clearly fed up with holding LT while pushing the analogue stick upright and pressing Y just to execute

a strategic retreat, developer Ensemble Studios has crafted an RTS which has clearly been built for the Xbox 360 from day one. Halo Wars contains none of the thumb gymnastics required by many of its peers, instead bolting an intuitive and accessible control scheme onto a remarkably solid and surprisingly tactical strategy game that just happens to be based in the Halo universe – which is a good thing.

Initially, it all seems a little 'My First RTS', the game's tutorials patiently explaining the



"Halo Wars has been built for the Xbox 360 from day one"

The game's CGI cut-scenes are beautiful, telling a compelling story which is skilfully woven around the various skirmishes in Campaign mode.



It's best to mix up your units a little rather than sending a battalion of tanks alone – one unit of anti-vehicle troops and your best-laid plans can go to waste.



CONTROL ➤



Behind Enemy Lines

The art of the Covenant



Jackal



Hunter



Arbiter



Jackal

Jackals are the Covenant's anti-infantry units, and can be particularly devastating from sniper towers – even taking down Spartans in just a few shots. Meanwhile, Brute units are the Covenant's special forces, with powerful plasma guns which can take out UNSC infantry units in seconds.

> Halo Wars continued

simplest of commands. Yet genre stalwarts have the option to skip these, and it's clear that Microsoft is perhaps aiming more to entice fans of action games – especially those who loved Halo – rather than preaching to the converted. Venture further however, and even enthusiasts will have to admit that this is a game with real depth – perhaps beyond the expectations of many. Those vehemently opposed to real-time strategies may not find what they're looking for, but if you've ever been curious enough to take your first tentative steps into new and unfamiliar territory, it's likely that Halo Wars will be the perfect entry point for you.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

Let's start with those controls, because it's here that Ensemble skilfully avoids the pitfalls most developers fall into when crafting a console-based RTS. Simplicity is the key – the left analogue stick scrolls around the map, while the right pans and zooms. The A button selects units, or the build areas of your base, and X sends them to move and attack. The Y button



Deathmatch mode ups the pace, allowing you to quickly amass an army of powerful vehicles, with training time reduced for every unit and a boat-load of resources to start you off.



Different leaders have different play styles – we beat the more measured General Cutter in one battle before being surprised by the aggressive approach of Forge in the next.

"Simplicity is the key with the controls in Halo Wars"



HALO
WARS

> Halo Wars continued

uses each unit's special ability, while the D-pad zips you immediately to any alert, your base or your army, with Up used for special commander powers. You can use the triggers to fast-scroll and sub-select units, with the bumpers used to select units on a global or local basis. Selecting a small on-screen group of units is simply a case of holding the A button and dragging the cursor over those you wish to issue an order to.

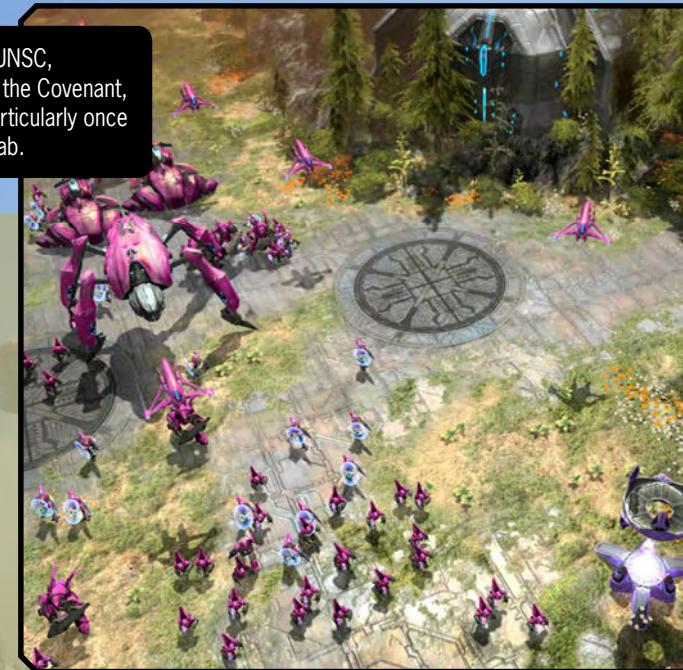
This simple and elegant system eschews menus almost entirely, keeping the action on-screen at all times – apart for those occasions when you're upgrading your base. This keeps things feeling more immediate, maintaining the sort of frantic pace you'd expect from the Halo games, while affording players the level of instant control the best PC strategies provide.

“While the focus is on combat, it’s vital to keep your bases in order”



If you feel like one of the two races has a bit of an advantage, you can pit one UNSC force against another – that way you can't blame the game if you lose!

While the campaign has you playing as the UNSC, Skirmish mode offers the chance to control the Covenant, it's certainly entertaining to switch sides, particularly once you have the resources to unleash the Scarab.



While the focus is on the combat – and more on that shortly – it's vital to keep your bases in order to ensure your units are efficient in the field. Your base initially has just a few spaces on which you can add buildings – start with a supply pad and you can build up your resources quicker. These can be spent on other additions – a barracks will train ground troops, a depot sends vehicles into the fray, an air pad provides you with Hornets and Vultures, while a field armoury



Warthogs are best utilised in the early game – scouting out enemy emplacements and securing base positions before beating a hasty retreat.

ROLL OVER
THE BIG
PICTURE



> Halo Wars continued

offers research into special buffs and upgrades. Meanwhile, a reactor increases your base's tech level, offering you more advanced units but at greater cost. All of these buildings can be upgraded to increase their efficiency, and you can build auto-fire turrets to protect the base. All straightforward stuff for strategy veterans, but it's implemented in a wonderfully unobtrusive way – a booming voice informs of any

"All buildings can be upgraded to increase their efficiency"

completed buildings or upgrades, as well as notifying you when your base is then under attack, so you can just set the wheels of construction in motion while still keeping an eye on the bigger picture.

There's a rock-paper-scissors approach to combat



Though initially fairly flimsy, Warthogs can be upgraded with a grenadier or machine gunner to add a bit of clout to their attacks.



The Elephant is General Cutter's special unit. It's a mobile base which can be used to train infantry units away from home.





> Halo Wars continued

which keeps the early game straightforward before things get progressively more complex. Initially, all you need to know is that vehicles beat infantry, which beat aircraft which beat vehicles. And that knowledge is perfectly fine for the first couple of missions of the game's campaign, which is undoubtedly the best jumping-off point for newcomers.

Set 20 years before the Halo event, you control the crew of the Spirit of Fire, a UNSC ship in the orbit of a planet named Harvest, now under UNSC control after a prolonged battle against the Covenant. As veteran Sergeant Forge, you're sent down to the

snowy wastes to rescue a series of pinned-down crew members, valiantly fighting against the Covenant resistance. Forge leads from his Warthog, whose special ability is to ram enemies – not particularly useful against other vehicles, but perfect against the infantry here. Though it's viewed from a distance, there's still that familiarly springy feel to the Warthog's movement, as you lead a cavalry charge into enemy territory, the vehicles having



The Banshee is the Covenant's standard air unit. It's quick but not too strong, so probably best used as a scouting vehicle.



Forge's special ability is the Carpet Bomb – a powerful air strike which can be directed towards a line of enemies or a base.



> Halo Wars continued

no problem with the bumpy terrain, leaving tyre tracks in the snow as they skid into position. Once you have the marines, you need to swap to controlling the ground troops, who are the only units able to pass through the Covenant shields, destroying the generators so vehicles can pass through.

Though your ultimate aim is to destroy the Covenant troops attacking your base, score bonuses are awarded for completing optional objectives – the first mission offering points for killing 100 grunts. With gold, silver, bronze and tin medals awarded depending on how long you took, your kill-to-killed ratio and the side objectives completed, there's the potential for plenty of replay value, particularly on the Heroic or Legendary difficulty levels.

Mission two then sees Forge attempting to stop the Covenant from detonating a mysterious holy relic – gradually introducing more ideas and units into the equation before the third mission mixes things up further, with enemy Elites trapping Forge and potential love interest Professor Anders, with the player taking command of some

"There's the potential for plenty of replay value here"

Grizzly Tanks to fight their way through as backup. That accomplished, you then have to protect Anders while she hacks some bridge controls to provide an exit and racing away before Covenant forces can arrive in numbers. Brilliantly, there's an optional objective which sees you killing Covenant pursuers by deactivating the bridge while they're crossing, while the brisk pace is maintained – none of these missions should take players more than 20 minutes to complete.

RESCUE MISSION

The artifact sends the UNSC to a planet named Arcadia. With alien forces inside the city limits, you're tasked with rescuing the populace by guiding them to cargo transports, and ensuring the ships themselves are kept intact. This terrific mission is a real balancing act, forcing you to keep tabs of at least three different areas of the battlefield, with frequent alerts on your mini-



ROLL OVER
THE BIG
PICTURE

If you're playing as the Covenant, you know you're in trouble when Vultures join the fight. A couple of these hardy air units should force you to beat a hasty retreat.



Halo Wars doesn't skimp on the action right from the start. This hectic scene is from the campaign's third mission, where you have to protect Professor Anders.



> Halo Wars continued

map requiring careful yet rapid prioritisation. It's a sign of how well-moderated the learning curve is that this doesn't seem like too big an ask, while the utopian city environment makes you yearn for a Halo level that looks like that.

Mission five of 15 – and the last we're permitted to discuss – sets you against overwhelming odds as your squad attempts to secure a defendable position until backup can arrive. With so few units initially available, it's here that your hero is most likely to perish for the first time – yet Forge can be revived by another unit remaining close for a certain amount of time. The same goes for the Spartans you control in this mission, meaning as long as your base can maintain a steady flow of new units, you'll have enough to get by until the Omega Spartans are dropped in, whereupon the tide of battle turns in your favour. You'll feel like yelling 'oo-rah!' along with your troops as the Omegas lay waste to the enemy base. Well, we did anyway.

Any questions about lack of depth of variety are blown away by those

opening five missions, and of the 10 which follow, the ones we've experienced have all added their own wrinkles to the formula. From larger vehicles which can be locked into position to fire on distant targets, to missions where you've a wealth of resources to deal with one particularly fearsome enemy (let's just say Halo fans will likely know which kind of foe we're talking about), Halo Wars keeps things fresh throughout its campaign. And that's arguably not even the



"Halo Wars keeps things fresh throughout its campaign"

Forge insists that Anders isn't his girlfriend, though he's prepared to put his own life at risk to protect her. He's fooling no-one.

Covenant dropships are useful in air-to-air battles, though they're in danger from the more powerful ground vehicles.





HALO
WARS

> Halo Wars continued

meat of the single-player game, which can be found in the Skirmish mode – a series of 14 maps offering one-on-one or team-based games, with adaptable difficulty if you want a challenge best suited to your own abilities. The chance to play as the Covenant may be too difficult for some to pass up, particularly given the effectiveness of their special powers – the Arbiter has a Rage mode which puts him under full player control, able to destroy vehicles with just a few swipes, or to decimate groups of infantry in seconds. Meanwhile the Prophet of Truth's Cleansing Ray can turn an undefended base to rubble when fully powered-up. Each leader also has a unique unit – General Cutter can call upon ODSTs, while the Arbiter has Suicide Grunts – while the UNSC members have additional bonuses. Bases starting at a higher tech level is undoubtedly useful,

though you might prefer Anders' half-price unit upgrades instead.

With a suite of online multiplayer

options, Halo Wars is undoubtedly a substantial package. It's an RTS that has plenty of appeal outside the genre's usual reach, and its exceptional presentation means it looks as good as it plays. Hopefully this and the Halo setting will be enough to tempt the masses who have yet to be won over to the RTS genre, so Ensemble's swansong should be the first real breakout hit for the strategy genre on console. ●



Roll over screen for annotations



While there's always plenty going on, the action is remarkably straightforward to control.

“Halo Wars is undoubtedly a substantial package”



CONTROL ➔



**THE SKIRMISH MODE**

FINISH THE FIGHT

Why Skirmish will soon be taking over your life

As we've suggested in the main preview, it could be argued that the Campaign is merely training for Halo Wars' Skirmish and online multiplayer modes.

Skirmish offers battles against up to five AI bots – you can face off against a single AI opponent or join forces with other computer-controlled leaders for 2-v-2 and 3-v-3 matches.

The Standard ruleset starts you with limited resources and one base. You'll need to spend time waiting for your supply pad to start bringing in resources, or you can send out infantry to obtain some from crates scattered around the field.

A deathmatch game is much quicker and chaotic – offering you a base with a maximum tech level, all land and air vehicles, and ground troops available as soon as their

buildings are built. Leader Powers recharge much quicker too, allowing Anders to freeze groups of enemies with her Cryo bomb, or the Prophet of Regret to wreak devastation with his cleansing ray. Deathmatch also allows you to get your Uber units out earlier. The UNSC has the powerful Vultures which are vulnerable to anti-air units but which can withstand a fair battering and deal out a barrage of missiles as their special power, while the enormous Scarab can only be built if you're holding enough bases, but is virtually unbeatable when deployed. A combination of Leader Powers and quick-fire attacks work well, but it takes some punishment before finally exploding.

The maps offer a good mix of more tactical play and all-out action – Blood Gulch has teleporters which allow you to spring surprise attacks,

while the snowy Chasms offers sniper towers to defend key positions. Meanwhile, Terminal Moraine has timed bridges to access difficult to reach areas – should your units be crossing when the lights start blinking then they'd better hurry, otherwise they'll fall to their doom. Occasionally things can get a little hectic on the 3-v-3 stages, but Halo Wars is all about large-scale battles, and the battles that ensue when several forces converge are stunning.

AVOIDING PITFALLS

The game's AI is generally very good – the difficulty adapts according to your previous performances in the field, though you can also revert to the presets of Easy, Normal, Heroic and Legendary. While AI allies tend to attack at their own pace, they can often come to your rescue in a sticky spot – one particularly pleasing occasion saw our UNSC

chum step in to repair one of our armies after we unleashed a barrage of shots at an enemy base and found ourselves caught from the rear just before we were finished. The additional health boost allowed us to finish the job and our troops scraped through by the skin of their teeth. Should your buddies be running short on numbers then you can transfer any supplies which are surplus to current requirements.

While this can't quite compare to the thrill of the online battle, Skirmish feels as close to competing against real opponents as you're likely to get, and it means that solo players won't feel short-changed once they're done with the Campaign. And with the chance to add a dash of variety to proceedings with any Skulls you've unlocked – from magnified destruction physics to rainbow-tinted Scarab lasers – you'll find plenty to keep you busy for months. ☺



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CONTROL ➔





INTERVIEW

DEVINE WRITE

Still need to know more about *Halo Wars*? Time for a chat with the game's writer

Realising the *Halo* universe from a new perspective was a challenge that lead writer Graeme Devine relished. We spoke to him about the game's plot, its unique controls, its future, and how exactly Ensemble managed to

create a real-time strategy out of a first-person shooter.

What was your first priority when you set out to make *Halo Wars*? What one thing above all else did you want to achieve?

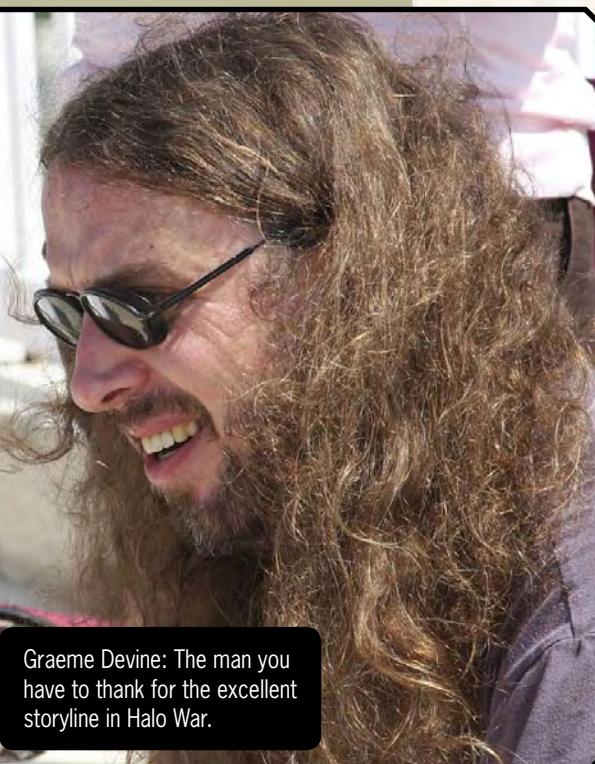
To be honest, it doesn't look good for the human race.



I think the biggest priority was to get the controls right. It's great to be doing a *Halo* game, but no one will play it if the controls are bad, and real-time strategy games on the console are notorious for bad control schemes. We actually spent the first 18 months of the project on getting the controls right, and a lot of that work is still in the product today (things like the circle menu, build from buildings and select/move controls are all the same).

The game is set 20 years before *Halo*. Can you tell us a little more about the plot, and how it links to the original *Halo*?

In 2526 the Covenant attack the UNSC colony 'Harvest', which is one of the main agricultural planets humans have. After five years we have reclaimed the planet



Graeme Devine: The man you have to thank for the excellent storyline in *Halo War*.



> Interview continued

and won it back from the Covenant but the planet is no longer livable; it's a nuclear winter, and so it's a very hollow victory for the human race. On the surface of Harvest though, near the northern pole, the Covenant have found a Forerunner structure in the ice and have been excavating it. The UNSC has sent two ships to investigate. The first ship, 'The Prophecy', is destroyed when it arrives, and a lot of that story is then told in the limited

collector's limited edition comic book, but the second ship 'Spirit of Fire' is the one we follow throughout the campaign. It discovers that there is more to the situation than meets the eye, and that unless action is taken very quickly, the war may go bad for the UNSC.

Does Halo Wars add enough to the Halo universe to tempt first-person shooter fans across to the strategy genre?

I think seeing the combat from a different perspective – while still



Fans of the Halo series might not recognise the gameplay, but the graphically style should be very familiar.

being deeply rooted in Halo – is something Halo fans will want to see. All the Halo action is there, the sounds, effects, physics and so forth, but instead of seeing it from the single unique perspective of Master Chief, it's from the perspective of the whole battle, and there is something pretty darn exciting about being able to both see and control that aspect of the

game. It's still very visceral and combat-focused – you're not sending peasants to go and dig in the dirt!

Halo Wars is a more accessible RTS than some will be used to. Are you concerned about alienating hardcore strategy fans with the game's more immediate approach?

You're absolutely right; it is more accessible, but getting real-time strategy fans to appreciate that is very important. I think that while it is very accessible, Halo Wars offers depth that's not immediately obvious to casual players but should be something hardcore players can latch onto very quickly. For example, the upgrade to the reactor is very expensive – much more



"Halo Wars offers depth that isn't obvious to casual gamers"

**CONTROL**



> Interview continued

expensive than building a second reactor – but that cost then has to be countered against losing a building slot to build something else on around your base. It's actually a pretty interesting little strategy there, and just one of the ways that I think depth is still there, but perhaps represented a little differently than how we've seen it before in other strategy games.

Did having a universe already in place make development easier, or did that make certain elements harder to implement?

I think mostly it helped. It's hard to answer because we didn't go both ways. If anything, it takes a while to appreciate the story, and why you can't suddenly give humans ray guns and be done with any balance. Humans still shoot lead, while the aliens are big and have plasma rifles. But that's part of any classic alien invasion – War of the Worlds, Independence Day, etc. All these films pit humans against some overwhelming odds, and so I think we like being that lopsided. The units, vehicles and so forth were pretty balanced for the most part.

We added more to the UNSC than the Covenant, because the UNSC had one pretty vital character that played through all three previous games, and we needed a little more than Master Chief this time around!

"The fact that we made the game for the 360 alone allows us to do much more with the controls"

Previous console real-time strategy games have often been developed for the PC first and then ported across. What would you say is the main advantage of having created a console-focused RTS game from the ground up?

I think that is the single biggest flaw in other strategy games right there. The fact that we made this game for the 360 alone allows us to do so much more with the controls, and take advantage of being on a TV without having to think about how it's all going to work on a PC down the road. Halo Wars



You'll need to build up your forces before you attack an enemy base.



The great control system makes it easy to control your forces.





HALO
WARS

> Interview continued

could not take advantage of the 360 controller if we had to keep thinking about the mouse and keyboard at the same time, and so those other games have found a pretty uncomfortable middle ground in my opinion that hurts both their console and PC versions in the long run.

Do you feel you've managed to strike the balance between creating a standalone game and offering fan service to those who love the Halo series? How have you managed to ensure that it appeals to both groups?

I think this is the best campaign that Ensemble has ever made, and it's very sad it's our last. Ensemble is also always very focused on the multiplayer experience, as that's what most of us here play every day.

I feel we're definitely there with an awesome Halo story in a very compelling campaign that has some really fantastic moments, and an online multiplayer experience unlike any other on Xbox Live. Certainly when I watch people play the game that's the impression I get. It's great to watch people play the game as you get a lot of feedback from it.

Can you tell us any more about Bungie's involvement with the game? Were they very hands-on?

We went up there a lot in the beginning of the game's development and talked about the story and what it meant to be a Halo game. They were pretty busy working on Halo 3, but throughout the project we would talk to them about the current build and listen to their feedback. The guys at Bungie were great to work with, and their insights were extremely valuable.

Is there any chance of a map editor at some point?

That would be totally awesome, but I don't think it's going to happen. We don't have the people to support the tool, and it wasn't part of the core design in the way that Forge was integrated into Halo 3.

Which single aspect of the game are you most proud of?

I think the campaign and campaign story are done really well, and I'm proud that we tell such a strong story in the Halo universe.

With Ensemble sadly being wound down after Halo Wars, does this mean that there is no

"I feel we're definitely there with an awesome Halo story in a very compelling campaign"

chance of Halo Wars 2, or is the team moving elsewhere in Microsoft to continue the fight?
I can't comment on what's going to happen in the future. I would very much love to see (and work) on Halo Wars 2 though!

What is the one thing you couldn't do in this one that you'd like to see in a sequel?

I think make the Flood playable and make that work. We tried in HW to make that happen but nothing seemed to gel and feel like the Flood so we stuck with the Covenant/UNSC playable civs. I'd love a chance to get the Flood civ working in the next one. ☺

Another batch of soldiers head off to certain death...





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